

The politics of anti-environmentalism: positional issue framing by the European radical right

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Abstract

The environment is traditionally considered as a valence issue where all political parties endorse the same position and differ only on the degree to which they emphasize it. Our paper challenges this view by arguing that the environment is increasingly perceived as a positional issue. We examine cross-country mass survey data and demonstrate that many voters perceive a trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth. This perception is increasingly reflected in the discourse of political parties. In particular, expert surveys and party manifesto data indicate the existence of anti-environmental positions among radical right/nationalist parties, a finding which challenges the view that the environment is a distinctively left-wing issue. By qualitatively analyzing the most recent national and European election manifestos of thirteen radical right parties in Western Europe we demonstrate the ways in which these parties frame their anti-environmental positions and conclude that analyses of voting behaviour should take into account the positional nature of the issues associated with environmental protection.

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1 Introduction

Concern for the environment entered strongly the political agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s and has since become one of the core issue of what has been labelled as the ‘new politics’ dimension of political ideology. Early on, and while making their contribution to the alignment-dealignment debate, Flanagan & Dalton (1984) argued that in Western Europe some of the ‘new issues’ associated with the environment, most notably environmental pollution, can be considered to be valence issues. The term valence appeared in political science for the first time in Stokes’ (1963) seminal critique of the Downsian spatial framework (Downs 1957). Stokes developed the term ‘valence’ to define consensus issues, in other words issues on which the whole electorate is in agreement on the desired outcome and all political parties have one clear ideological position. Subsequently party competition is structured around performance. Political parties argue that they can tackle these issues in a more effective manner and citizens vote based on their (retrospective or prospective) evaluations about the parties’ performance. In this sense, valence issues are contrasted to ‘position’ issues which involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives or which involve trade-offs between two highly desirable but mutually exclusive outcomes (Heath, Jowell & Curtice 1985). These alternatives structure a continuum that captures the distribution of voter preferences on the issue (Stokes 1963, 373) while parties can be ‘for’ or ‘against’ the issue in question along this continuum (Budge 2001*a*, 83).

Economic prosperity/growth, lower crime, national security, high-quality health care and education, and a clean environment are issues which have been consistently used as core examples of valence issues (Clarke et al. 2011, Green 2007, van der Brug 2004). As Jordan & Rayner (2010, 71) put it, ‘the environment has always been a valence issue. Who, after all, can be possibly against “a better environment”?’ Studies of West European politics (Rohrschneider 1988) as well as American politics (Jacoby 1994) contest to this categorization. In effect, considering the environment as a valence issue implies a large degree of consensus among the electorate. In this respect Dunlap (1995, 107) has argued that even though there is no clear large active pro-environment bloc, environmental protection has the large support of the majority of the electorate, making this into a valence issue. Along the same lines, Mertig & Dunlap (1995) concluded that environmental protection has reached the valence status, as it elicits little public opposition and predicted that environmentalism would remain a vital component of Western political systems for the foreseeable future. It is often therefore typically assumed that environmental protection, like other valence issues typically obtain support

from the majority of respondents in virtually all countries within the sample (Harrison & McIntosh 2007) and in several studies of voting behaviour the argument has been that most people agree on the desired policy outcome regarding environmental concerns (Aardal 1990, Johns, Mitchell, Denver & Pattie 2009). Consequently, projects aiming to estimate the policy positions of political parties such as the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) typically assume that parties differ with respect to environmental protection only in the degree to which they emphasize the issue.

In this paper we challenge the view of the environment as a valence issue. We begin by challenging the assumption of consensus among the electorate. Using evidence from the European Social Survey (European Social Survey 2002) we examine the dimensionality of the issue of environmental protection among voters and conclude that the degree of consensus is largely contingent on how questions in mass surveys are asked. The consensus on which the valence view of the environment is based could be an artefact of the question wording, while alternative operationalizations reveal that the percentage of European electorates with anti-environmental attitudes is non-trivial. Recognizing the existence of anti-environmental attitudes among European electorates, we switch to examining the positions of political parties. We show that, when scaled properly, different data sources point out that many political parties have positions which are practically anti-environmental. Moreover, the comparison of different sources shows that these anti-environmental positions are largely concentrated among parties that have been labelled as ‘radical’, ‘populist’ or ‘extreme’ right. To gain a better understanding of these anti-environmental positions, we analyze the content of national and European election manifestos of thirteen such parties in Western Europe. We find that radical right parties have largely incorporated anti-environmentalism within the main ideological tenets of their party family. Our paper concludes that such polarization of attitudes and positions effectively negates the treatment of the environment as a valence issue and suggest that it should not be operationalized as such in studies seeking to explain voting behaviour.

2 Anti-environmental attitudes among West European electorates

As argued above, in many studies, the environment has been used as a valence issue without necessarily performing in-depth investigations regarding its dimensionality and the levels of consensus across different electorates and

party systems. Nevertheless, recent research has challenged the notion that valence issues automatically imply a high degree of consensus. As Pardos-Prado (2012, 10) argues, the link between valence and consensus might be based on disputable theoretical assumptions, while he effectively showed that the ‘aggregate effect of party competence perceptions is positively correlated with party ideological polarization, voter ideological polarization, and the strength of spatial voting.’ In effect this brings us back to an examination of what valence issues really entail.

Political issues have both positional and valence aspects. Traditional spatial issues that divide the public also need a valence component to demonstrate which party is capable enough to deal with the issue, regardless of position. Similarly traditional valence issues, such as economic prosperity have a positional edge related to the path a party can take to achieve the commonly desired goal. Therefore an issue can be framed one way or the other depending on the context and issues can fluctuate between position and valence. Issues can have a life cycle during which they can polarise public opinion and party ideology or they can build a consensus around a commonly desired goal. As a consequence, issues that attract high levels of consensus can be considered as valence issues. Valence issues have two important characteristics: public opinion on them is converged on one ideal point and subsequently party competition is structured around performance. To achieve the commonly desired outcome the mentioned issues required very complex policy making. Opinion convergence allows the voters to avoid stressing on the details of these policies and to focus on performance when deciding which party to vote for.

This cognitive sequence poses a problem in the use of the term ‘valence’. Many scholars treat as valence issues those issues related to measuring of performance of leader and parties and forget about the first step of establishing whether an issue inspires opinion consensus and thus can be legitimately pass to the next level of cognition, performance. Nobody can be against ‘a better environment’ in absolute terms but in politics nothing is presented as an absolute value. When environmental protection is presented as an obstacle for economic growth or as an interference with the country’s sovereignty it leads to interesting ideological debates. To achieve the commonly desired outcome of ‘clean environment’ very complex policy making is required. Extreme opinion convergence allows the voters to avoid stressing on the details of these policies and to focus on performance when deciding which party to vote for. This cognitive sequence, however, implies that the degree on which an issue can be considered to be a ‘valence’ issue depends on the way the issue is framed: as a yes/no issue or as a trade-off. Framing the environment as a yes/no issue leads to general agreement on it, but it also minimizes the

public debate on it. The moment its salience increases, however, a new debate starts on how to implement policies leading to a ‘clean environment’. These policies immediately introduce trade-offs that do not allow the issue to remain a straight valence issue.

More specifically, we can agree that there are various ways in which we can go about and protect the environment but some are more costly than others. Do people agree on road taxing or green taxes in general? How about nuclear power? Should we assume that everybody agrees that it is environmentally dangerous and should be abolished as soon as possible? By thinking about the environment in these terms we can easily come to the conclusion that even though there is an apparent agreement on the goal of ‘clean environment’ there seems to be no agreement about the specific course of action. This, of course, leaves open the possibility for a considerable part of the electorate to voice preferences on policies that are effectively anti-environmental.

Past research on support for environmental protection indicated that the degree of consensus largely depends on how survey questions are framed. For instance, questions asking whether the environment is an urgent problem produced largely overwhelming majorities of affirmative responses in the 1990/91 World Values survey. A similar pattern emerges from the 2002 European Social Survey data. Figure 1 shows a ‘violin’ plot of citizens’ median placement and distribution over a six point ordinal scale on the whether it is important to care about nature and the environment among 15 West European countries.¹ The figure shows that, in each of these countries, an overwhelming majority of citizens agree that it is important for them to care about the environment.

As Dalton (2002, 110) noted, however, ‘popular views can be expressed in a survey without concern for the actual costs of a policy’. In this respect questions tapping environmental support can be framed in terms of associated costs. It is quite telling therefore that when citizens were asked whether they would be willing to pay higher taxes to prevent environmental pollution, the overwhelming majorities in many countries evaporated (Inglehart 1995, 60). More curiously, when the question was phrased negatively asking whether respondents agreed that the government has to reduce environmental pollution but it should not cost them any money (Inglehart 1995, 60), the overwhelming majorities were transformed to overwhelming minorities in most of the countries. The 2002 European Social Survey has not included such a

¹The question described a person for whom ‘looking after the environment is important to him/her’ and asked respondents to state whether this person is like them on a scale ranging from ‘very much like me’ (1) to ‘not like me at all’ (6).

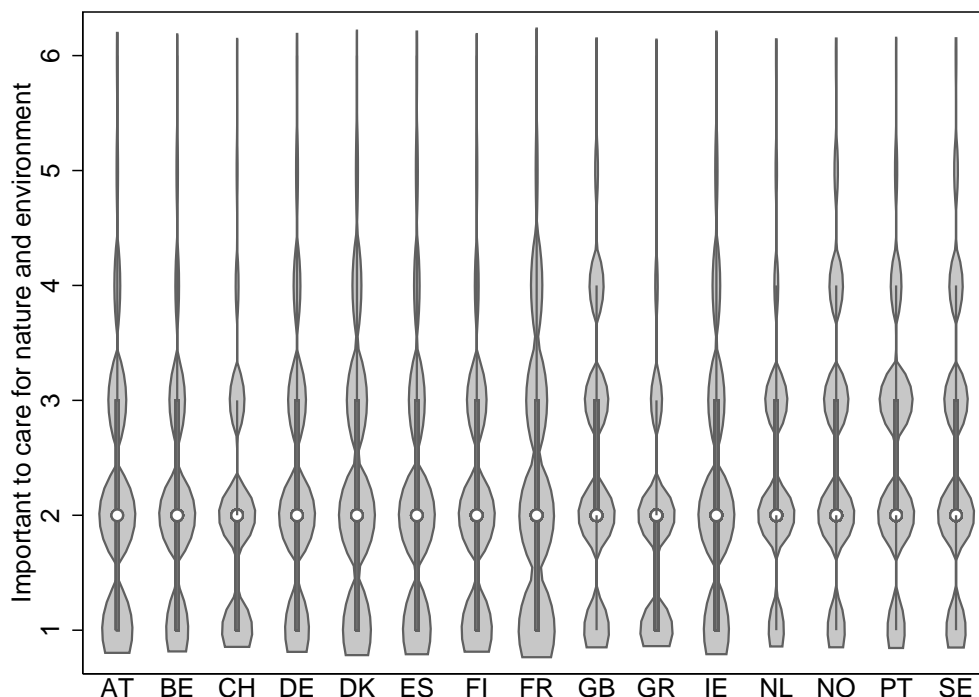


Figure 1: Distribution and median response regarding the importance of caring about the environment (2002 European Social Survey).

question, but an alternatively framed question suggested that environmental protection could imply opposition to economic growth. The conflict between economic growth and environmental protection reflects differences between materialist and post-materialist values and ‘the clash over alternative values creates a basis for political competition’ (Dalton 2002, 77). The argument goes that we cannot demand a clean environment and support industrial growth, as we cannot demand lower taxes and an increase in public spending at the same time. In a sense, doing so would be equivalent to eating the cake and having it. Figure 2 shows the median response and distribution over a 5-point ordinal scale where 5 indicates strong agreement that economic growth always ends up harming the environment.

As seen in Figure 2, the distribution of responses is radically different compared to the question about the importance of caring about the environment. In six out of 15 countries, median response is at the anti-environmental side of the scale. In these countries respondents felt that economic growth does not really harm the environment which is at odds with ecological thinking about environmental protection. As Dryzek (1997, 46–49) showed, the

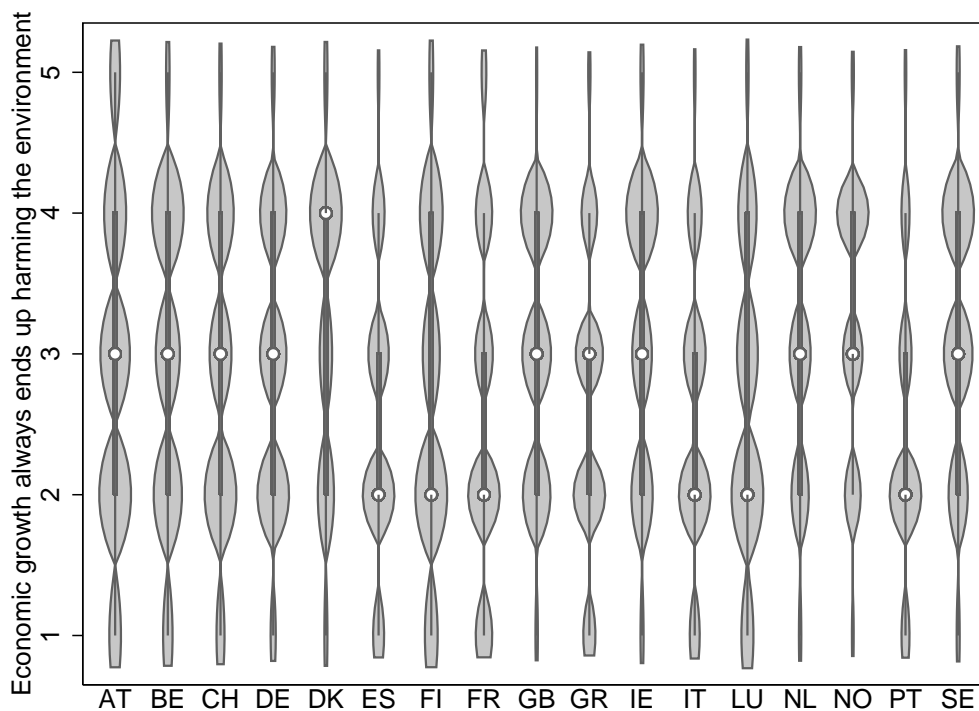


Figure 2: Distribution and median response regarding the trade-off between growth and the environment (2002 European Social Survey).

belief that economic growth can continue unabated without environmental damage is rooted in evidence regarding the falling price of natural resources. Of course the price of natural resources falls not because they become more abundant but because modern technology allows using them in a more efficient way. For instance, natural resources were able to meet the rising global needs for energy by switching from wood to coal, then oil and natural gas, then to nuclear fission and finally nuclear fusion. This implies that respondents feel that nuclear energy is safe and non-polluting which in turn reflects trust that science can address environmental issues effectively without necessarily reducing the current growth rates. This in turn implies that the belief that scientific progress can allow perpetual growth without harming the environment, can tap anti-environmental attitudes.

The European Social Survey explicitly connects science with environmental attitudes by asking whether science can solve environmental problems. The distribution and median response for this question can be found in Figure 3. The figure presents a pattern which is largely similar to Figure 2 implying that there is a substantive number of respondents who have

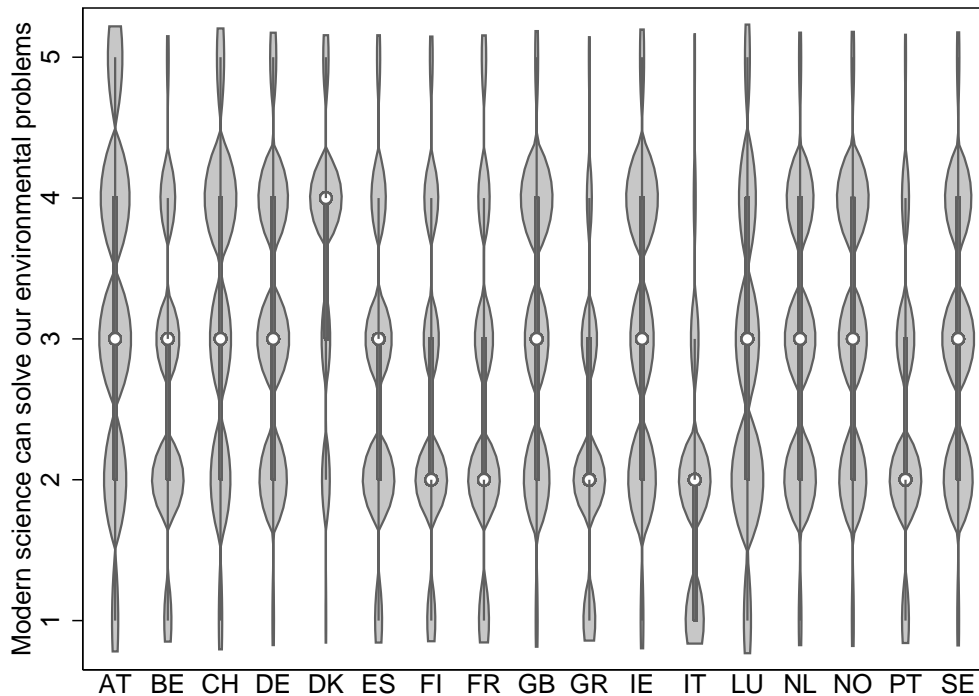


Figure 3: Distribution and median response regarding trust that science can solve environmental problems (2002 European Social Survey).

attitudes that are practically anti-environmental. Nevertheless, although responses to this question have been used as a proxy for anti-environmentalism to explain support for radical right parties (see Ivarsflaten 2008), others contend that the double-barreled nature of the question make it an ineffective measure as negative responses might not measure environmentalism but instead measure distrust to science (Dolezal 2010, 548). Polychoric correlations between the questions in Figures 2 and 3 within each country proved to be very weak ($< .1$).² This implies that the citizens that appear to have anti-environmental attitudes using one question are not the same that appear to have anti-environmental attitudes using another question. This points to the problem already discussed above, namely that the degree of commitment to environmental protection among European publics cannot be easily tapped through mass survey and the distribution of responses depends largely on the framing of the question. The evidence presented here, however, also point

²Judging from the standard errors, the polychoric correlations were also found to be statistically insignificant, with the exception of Greece and Ireland. In both countries, however, the coefficients were also extremely weak at $< .2$.

that the supposed overwhelming consensus in favour of environmental protection might in fact be an artefact of the question format. When alternative questions are used, non-trivial portions of the European electorates appear to have attitudes which are practically anti-environmental.

3 Anti-environmental positions among West European parties

The previous question challenged the fact that the environment can be considered as a valence issue among West European electorates. This leads us to the next question. If indeed considerable parts of the West European electorates harbour anti-environmental attitudes, would not it be rational for political parties to mobilize on an anti-environmental agenda? In our individual level findings it was clear that, if framed in absolute terms, very few people are against 'a better environment'. On this basis, and following the proponents of valence models of political behaviour, Budge (2001*b*, 212–213) has argued that, for valence issues, 'only one position can be adopted by parties without committing electoral suicide'. Conversely, analyses of the environmental issue in party competitions have stressed that, although campaigning explicitly on an anti-environmental agenda (like the Swiss Motorists' Party did in the 1980s) is quite rare, there is evidence that 'mainstream' parties often take positions which are practically anti-environmental (Mair 2001, 104) and that positioning on secondary issues such as the environment provides strong electoral incentives (List & Sturm 2006). This is in line with our findings that, when the environment is framed as a trade-off, then anti-environmental positions are detected among the electorates. Thus framing for parties and voters goes hand-in-hand. These findings can be supplemented by additional evidence from the US ranging from historical accounts such as Richard Nixon's strong anti-environmental record in office (Turner 2009), to content analysis of environmental scepticism books suggesting the making of a conservative anti-environmental counter-movement (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008).

Regardless of this evidence, the most popular data source for the policy positions of political parties has traditionally considered valence issues such as the environment. The CMP allowed for coding only positive pro-environmental references. The CMP has performed content analysis on thousands of documents on the premise that political parties confront each other not by taking opposing positions but by emphasizing different policy issues, although some of the categories in the CMP coding scheme allowed for coding to be performed within a positional (pro/against) framework (for a critical view see

Laver 2001). More specifically, the CMP coding scheme includes two relevant categories (Volkens 2002, 33), ‘501: Environmental protection’ which includes all favourable references to:

‘preservation of countryside, forests, etc.; general preservation of natural resources against selfish interests; proper use of national parks; soil banks, etc; environmental improvement,’

and ‘416: Anti-growth economy’ which includes

‘Favourable mentions of anti-growth politics and steady state economy; sustainable development.’

The inclusion of the ‘Anti-growth economy’ category was necessitated by the increasing salience of environmental issues and the nuanced character of environmental politics after the emergence of Green parties since the late 1970s. Despite the fact that the CMP argued that it did not make sense for political parties to adopt anti-environmental positions, many researchers felt that the degree in which parties are committed to environmental protection oughts to be operationalized as a trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth (Carter 2006, Laver & Hunt 1992). The classic approach has therefore been to calculate the sum of categories 416 and 501 and subtract the references to category ‘410: Productivity’, defined as the

‘need to encourage or facilitate greater production; need to take measures to aid this; appeal for greater production and importance of productivity to the economy; the paradigm of growth.’

Weale et al. (2000, 427) were the first to adopt this approach, followed by Lowe et al. (2011) who argued for a slightly different scale which applies a logarithmic transformation to the issue categories in order to eliminate the effect of categories with zero frequency and reflect the decreasing marginal effect of every additional reference that is coded in any category.

Similarly, expert surveys have traditionally accounted for the presence of anti-environmental positions by asking experts to place parties on scales juxtaposing environmental protection to economic growth (Benoit & Laver 2006, Laver & Hunt 1992). An alternative approach to estimating parties’ policy positions focuses on the constructing Likert scales by combining parties’ positions on specific issues (Gemenis & Dinas 2010, Pellikaan, van der Meer & de Lange 2003). The idea behind this approach is that party competition is structured around a specific set of issues. Consequently, determining the position of any party on any policy dimension becomes a matter of estimating the position of the party on a set of issues that are representative

of this policy dimension (Gemenis 2012a). This effectively recognizes that parties can take pro or contra positions on issues relating to the environment and effectively enables researchers to construct scales which run from an pro-environmental to anti-environmental positions.

This latter approach is followed by many voting advice applications including the EU Profiler, a project which provides data from the positions of some 274 parties on 28 issue items for the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. Three out of the 28 items included in the EU Profiler refer to the environment. Item 16 asks whether ‘renewable sources of energy (e.g. solar or wind energy) should be supported even if this means higher energy costs’, item 17 whether ‘the promotion of public transport should be fostered through green taxes (e.g. road taxing)’, and item 18 whether ‘policies to fight global warming should be encouraged even if it hampers economic growth or employment’. Party responses on these items were coded on 5-point scales ranging from completely agree to completely disagree by a group of country experts using, among others, evidence from party manifestos and responses from questionnaires sent to party headquarters (Trechsel & Mair 2011). Although some aspects of the EU Profiler approach are somewhat questionable in methodological terms, the EU Profiler data allow researchers to produce valid representations of parties’ positions on several policy dimensions (Gemenis 2012a). Items 16, 17 and 18 can be combined in a reliable scale, judging from the monotone relationship between each of the items and a scale comprised of the remaining two as shown in Figure 4 (see also Gemenis & Dinas 2010, Gemenis 2012a).

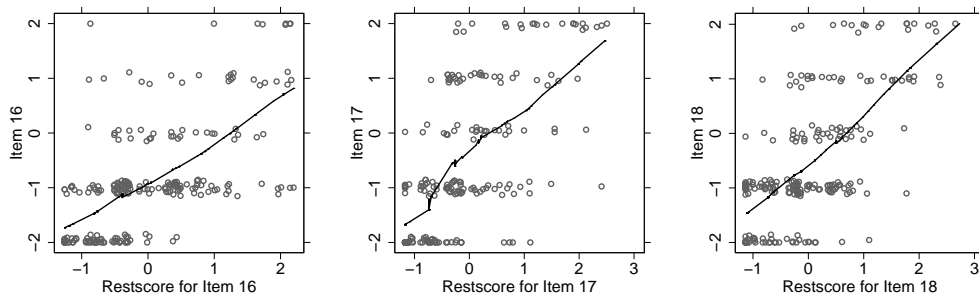


Figure 4: Examining the scalability of the items in the environmental scale (2009 EU Profiler data, loess curve with $\alpha = .7$, points jittered 5%).

So do parties adopt anti-environmental positions? Figure 5 presents a histogram with the distribution of party scores on the environment scale based on the EU Profiler data as explained above, where higher values indicate

anti-environmental positions. It becomes clear that, although most parties take position in favour of environmental protection (in favour of renewable sources of energy and green taxes, and against economic growth), there is a non trivial number of parties adopting positions which are effectively anti-environmental. Moreover, the comparison of the EU Profiler data to other sources, such as expert surveys and the content analysis of party manifestos shows that this finding is not an artefact of the estimation method. In each of the three scatterplots in Figure 6, where we compare the EU Profiler estimates to expert and manifesto estimates, there is a non-trivial concentration of parties near the top right corners which indicate anti-environmental positions.³

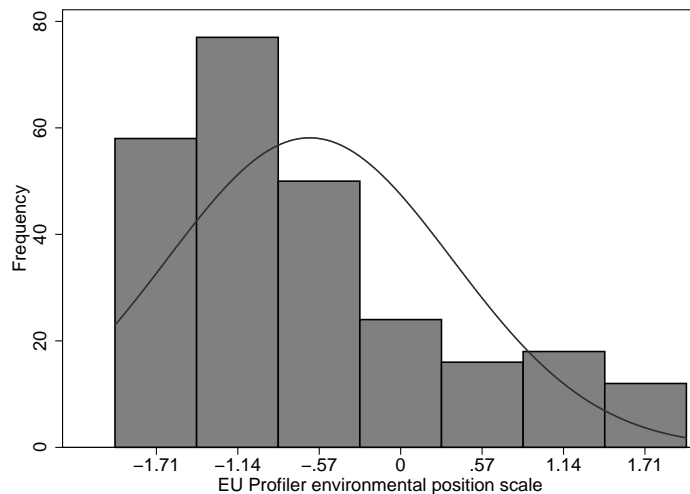


Figure 5: The distribution of party scores on the environmental/anti-environmental EU Profiler scale.

To be sure, different methods of estimating parties' policy positions measure different aspects of party ideology and they are likely to come up with different results (Dinas & Gemenis 2010, Volkens 2007). Moreover, different sources may display different results due to differences in measurement error of a non-random nature (Curini 2010, Gemenis 2012*b*). This is also true for the methods compared in Figure 6. Experts tend not to assign purely anti-environmental positions to parties as evident from the scatterplot on the left where the expert survey scale is censored at about .8. According to the experts, there seem to be no parties that *totally* advocate economic growth over

³To match parties' positions from different methods all scales were normalized in order to run from zero to one. For the CMP data, we only used estimates based on documents published between 2006 and 2010.

environmental protection, although there are some parties that score quite high in favour of economic growth. Conversely, the scaled data from the CMP shows that there are some parties which emphasize economic growth without making references to environmental protection in their manifestos. The manifesto based scales, however, show that most parties emphasize both economic growth and environmental protection while it is not possible to evaluate parties' exact positions on these issues by using the CMP data. This is where the EU Profiler data comes handy because it estimates parties' positions not indirectly (through the relative emphasis to different policy areas) but directly through the positions on specific environment-related issues. Nevertheless, the EU Profiler may still *underestimate* the degree of anti-environmentalism because the scales do not include parties' positions on the issue of nuclear energy which is likely to be viewed positively by many parties.

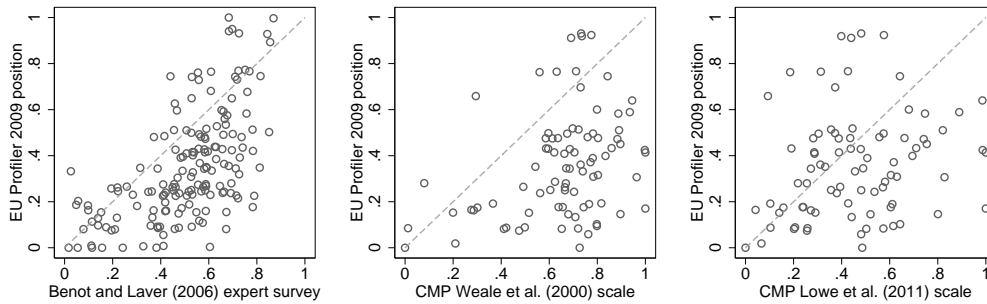


Figure 6: Comparing parties' positions on environmental/anti-environmental scales.

In any case, however, the comparison of different methods in measuring parties' positions regarding the environment shows a consistent pattern: the parties that appear closer to the top right quartile of the scatterplots are right-wing parties, most of them belonging to the family which has been characterized as extreme, radical or populist right (hereafter radical right). This pattern fits prior theoretical expectations about the radical right parties. According to Ignazi (1992) the emergence of the radical right can be linked to a 'counter-revolution' to the values brought to the political agenda by the green parties in the 1970s, such as multiculturalism and support for environmental protection. Consequently some have the attitudinal basis for supporting radical right parties is the mirror image of the attitudinal basis for supporting green parties. If multiculturalism and environmentalism distinguishes the green left, it is anti-immigrant attitudes and anti-environmentalism that distinguishes the radical right (Ivarsflaten 2008). In the following section

we investigate the degree to which radical right parties in Europe take anti-environmental positions and show how these positions are framed within their ideological discourse. Seeing that quantitative analyses of party manifestos might be ‘missing the tree’ when searching for the forest, we employ a qualitative reading of the manifestos of 13 European parties which have been considered to belong in what is known as the radical right party family.

4 How radical right parties frame their anti-environmental discourse

In this section we explore radical right party stance on the environment and assess the ways in which they frame it. Our sample comprises of thirteen parties from twelve European countries. These include the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB), the Danish People’s Party (DF), the True Finns (TF), the French *Front National* (FN), the German *Die Republikaner* (REP) and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), the Italian Northern League (NL), the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the British National Party (BNP) and the Swedish Democrats (SD). Although the radical right party family has been generally contested, there is broad consensus in the literature that the above parties belong to this family (see among others Art 2011, Arzheimer & Carter 2009, Ennser 2012, Mudde 2007). The main common characteristics of the above parties are their strong and mostly ethnically based nationalism, high levels of authoritarianism and a populist rhetoric (Mudde 2007).

We qualitatively analyze recent party national manifestos and the 2009 European election manifestos in order to complement the methods employed above and provide in-depth support for our findings, i.e. that radical right parties tend to be the ones that offer a clear anti-environmental message to the electorate.⁴ In order to systematize our cross-country analysis, we have a priori operationalized the environmental issue by focusing on some of its most prominent issue components, namely pollution, nuclear energy, quality of life, global warming, genetically modified crops and green taxes. In reading through the manifestos, we are interested in each party’s mentions of each individual issue component. We first identify the relevant statements related to each component and assess whether the party’s position is on the

⁴Details for the manifestos can be found in the Appendix. Quotes were translated by the authors and page numbers are given whenever available (some of the manifestos are only available unpaginated in electronic format).

environmental or anti-environmental side. We then proceed by distinguishing how each party frames the environment. The frames, as will be shown below, vary from typical radical right focusing on ‘strict law and order’ and ‘immigration’ to the trade-off between economic development and growth vis-a-vis environmental protection.

All the parties under investigation that mention the ‘pollution’ component agree that their country should be clean and free of any type of pollution. Interestingly, the Swiss SVP engages in blame-shifting arguments presenting socialism as the cause of all pollution (SVP 2011). More than half of the radical right parties argue that nuclear energy is needed to generate heat and electricity. They identify that renewable sources including solar, tidal, water and wind provide limited resources and as such European states will be unable to meet their power needs. The Austrian FPÖ prefers to focus on renewable energy sources as do the German REP and NPD and the Danish DF. Quality of life is a theme that does not appear as much in the parties’ manifestos possibly indicating its low salience relatively to the energy issue. The parties that do mention it, however, tend to link it with a traditional way of life (FN 2007), the ways in which people connect to their land (NPD 2005) and the link between quality of life and the preservation of national cultural heritage (LAOS 2007). The Danish DF (2009) argues that the environment is associated with qualitative growth and quality of life.

Apart from the Greek LAOS that positively acknowledges the challenge of global warming, party positions on this issue are clearly anti-environmental. The most anti-environmental party is the BNP (2010, 26) which argues that it is ‘the only party to oppose the global warming theory’. The Danish DF (2009) recognizes its existence but, similarly to the Italian LN (2009, 41), it views the human factor with scepticism. Similarly, the Belgian VB (2012, 13) argues that ‘we should not view global warming in fatalistic terms’.

Six out of the thirteen parties discuss the issue of genetically modified crops, again indicating that for more than half the parties this issue is not salient. FPÖ (2006, 2008, 2009), DF (2009), TF (2011), BNP (2005, 2010) and NPD (2009) are explicitly against this type of crops. The French FN provides a less coherent argument on the one hand mentioning that it is in favour of genetically modified food so long as the consumer remains informed (FN 2007, 46), but on the other hand it opposes international agreements permitting their import if they do not respect the French norms (FN 2009, 3).

Lastly, only the Greek LAOS and the Italian LN do not mention green taxes in their electoral manifestos. The remaining eleven parties are all overwhelmingly against environmental taxes. The Danish DF (2009) argues that ‘environmental taxes should not become just a new way to finance govern-

ment consumption'. Parties tend to agree that taxes have a negative effect on the development of the economy (REP 2002), that taxes would make energy more expensive (SVP 2011), that green taxes are disguised tax increases (VB 2012, 13), that pensioners and people from low incomes would have to pay (DF 2009) and that we should not financially 'punish' individuals (SD 2011, 27). The Finnish TF (2011, 67) even argues that we need to make driving cheaper. The Austrian FPÖ (2006) is somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, it supports taxing big cars but on the other it argues that VAT on energy must be cut in half. The Swedish SD (2011, 26) is the only party that accept taxes as incentives for environmental actions.

Table 1: Radical right party positions on key environment-related issues.

	Disagree	Inconclusive	Agree
Nuclear energy	DF, FPÖ, NPD, LAOS	REP	BNP, FN, LN, PVV, SD, SVP, TF, VB
GM crops	BNP, DF, FPÖ, NPD, TF	FN	-
Green taxes	BNP, DF, FN, NPD, PVV, TF, REP, SVP, VB	FPÖ	SD
Global warming is man-made	BNP, DF, LN, VB	NPD, SD	LAOS

Table 1 summarizes some of the results from our qualitative reading of the manifestos. The table presents only parties' positions in issue areas where taking a position makes sense (e.g. one cannot be in favour of pollution, but can be sceptical whether global warming is man made). As evident from the table, with the exception of the issue of GM crops, parties of the radical right party family tilt overwhelmingly to the anti-environmental side of position taking. The way the parties 'frame' the environmental issue is largely similar. We have identified a number of common themes on the basis of which radical right actors justify their anti-environmental positions. These include law and order, immigration, nationalism and anti-European frames. The use of technology as a means to resolve environmental problems is an occurring theme amongst some parties. The majority of parties acknowledge the existence of a trade-off between economic development and environmental protection.

The French FN (2007, 46) frames the environmental issue in terms of law and order arguing that 'we should strengthen measures and criminal sanc-

tions to prevent pollution in areas such as oil spills, forest fires, illegal dumps, vandalism etc'. Similarly, the German NPD (2002) argues that 'nature criminals should pay' and the Dutch PVV (2010, 45) that 'we should combat polluters'. The Italian LN (2009, 45) argues that local administrators of waste management should be penalized if they have not been responsible enough but also rewarded if they have been. The BNP (2010, 25) calls for a 'polluter pays principle' to be adopted and the creation of Environmental Courts that would 'investigate and prosecute fly-tippers, bush meat importers and commercial and industrial polluters'. The Swedish SD (2011, 27) argues that 'companies that earn money on environmentally destructive production may need to compensate for the damaged caused'.

Four parties associate the environment with immigration. This is not as surprising given that for these parties 'immigration control serves as a matrix—or a funnel—through which many other policies run' (Hainsworth 2008, 70). The BNP (2010, 24) views pollution as the result of mass immigration. It portrays itself at the 'only true "Green Party" in Britain as only the BNP intends to end mass immigration into Britain and thereby remove at a stroke the need for an extra 4 million homes in the green belts of the South East and elsewhere' (BNP 2005, 48). The Finnish TF (2011, 43) argues that migration flows will destroy 'our' environment whereas the French FN (2007, 45) warns that 'ecology should not become a pretext for a lenient immigration policy'. The Greek LAOS (2007, 43) makes a tenuous link between immigration and sustainable development interestingly linking this argument to a European council decision providing legal substance for this position.

The theme of energy independence and self-sustainability is one that consistently occurs in the parties' manifestos. The Austrian FPÖ (2006, 2008, 2009, 2011) argues that Austria can achieve energy independence through nuclear power and renewable sources. The Belgian VB (2012, 13) does not view nationalism and environmental concerns as contradictory. The BNP (2005), the Belgian VB (2009, 44) and the Dutch PVV (2010, 45) argue that their respective countries should obtain energy independence from Russia and the Arab states. The Swedish SD (2011) also prefers self-sufficiency. The Swiss SVP (2011) presents energy policy as embedded within national security. The Danish DF (2009) argues for national determination in food safety, whereas the French FN (2007, 45) presents the environmental richness of the country as fundamental for French quality of life and national identity.

These nationalist frames are also linked with a general anti-EU and anti-foreign investment feeling. The Dutch PVV (2010, 53) urges that Brussels stops deciding 'what our fishermen are allowed to do' while the Finnish TF (2011, 63) similarly argues that Brussels should not regulate the hunting of

wolves and other ‘pests’. The Italian LN (2009, 43) finds the EU too harsh whereas the French FN (2007, 46) does not accept a global eco-government.

Crucially, the parties under investigation acknowledge a clear trade-off between environmental protection and economic development. DF (2009) argues that environmental policy should take the economy into consideration. The Dutch PVV (2010, 51) actually urges to stimulate growth in Schiphol by reducing environmental regulation, and the Finnish TF (2011, 67) explicitly mentions that ‘we should not protect moose at the expense of the wood industry’. French FN (2007, 47) warns that the reduction of energy consumption should not result in lower standards of living. For REP (2002) economic development comes first, whereas the Italian LN (2008) aspires to find a ‘balance’ between the two. Swiss SVP (2011) argues that laws on environmental protection increase costs and bureaucracy, which impacts on the economy. Only the Greek LAOS (2007, 80) does not view environment and growth as necessarily antithetical given that Greece has sources of renewable energy, and the Austrian FPÖ (2008) views renewable energy resources as a way to increase employment.

5 Conclusions

In this paper we challenged the notion that the environment can be considered to be a valence issue implying that there is an overwhelming consensus regarding the desired policy outcome and that party competition is structured around performance. Building on previous arguments that challenged the direct link between valence and consensus (Pardos-Prado 2012), our analysis of cross-national survey data showed that the, too often assumed, consensus might be an artefact of the survey question framing. When questions are framed as policy trade-offs, West European electorates appear to be less pro-environmental than previously assumed.

Turning to political parties, our paper challenged the long held notion that it is impossible or counter-intuitive for parties to take anti-environmental positions. We showed that when the concept of environmentalism is operationalized appropriately (Dryzek 1997) and the data are scaled accordingly, some parties appear to take positions which are practically anti-environmental. In agreement with previous research (Ennser 2012, 161–162), we argued that anti-environmentalism is most prominent among parties in the radical right party family which shows a remarkable cohesion on the issue. Moreover, our qualitative analysis of the manifestos of 13 such parties revealed that their discourse regarding the environment does not constitute an alternative view of environmentalism, as has been previously argued (Olsen 1999), but

is framed within some of the classic ideological components of the radical right: opposition to immigration, nationalism, welfare chauvinism and Euroscepticism. Radical right anti-environmentalism can be understood as a materialist reaction against left-wing/green post-materialism (Ignazi 1992), as ‘the new coalition of forces which see their common enemy in the post materialist New Left and its political agenda’ (Minkenberg 1995, 224).

These challenging findings, when taken together point that taking anti-environmental positions should not necessarily lead to electoral suicide as previously assumed Budge (2001*b*, 212–213). In fact, the electoral performance of the thirteen parties which have been shown to in our quantitative and qualitative analyses is quite impressive. In the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, 12 out of the 13 parties won between 1.3 and 17% of the vote, securing altogether 27 out of the 736 seats, while the Swiss SVP earned 26.6% in the latest (2011) federal election. Radical right parties are becoming increasingly successful in the European political landscape and it seems that their anti-environmentalism contributes to the electoral choice for the radical right (Ivarsflaten 2008). Even though many of them may not have the capacity to directly influence policy (through coalition governments) given their ideological extremism, they do seem, however, to have the ability to change the dynamics of domestic competition by increasing the salience of the issues they focus on (Mudde 2007). For these reasons we suggest that future analyses of voting behaviour should reconsider the nature of party competition over the environment by taking into account the positional nature of the issues associated with environmental protection.

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Appendix

Table 2: Manifestos used in the qualitative analysis.

Reference	Document title
BNP 2005	Rebuilding British democracy
BNP 2010	Democracy, freedom, culture and identity
DF 2009	<i>Arbejdsprogram</i>
FN 2007	<i>Programme de gouvernement</i>
FN 2009	<i>'Leur' Europe n'est pas la notre! Voila l'Europe que nous voulons</i>
FPÖ 2006	<i>Wahlprogramm</i>
FPÖ 2008	<i>Österreich im Wort</i>
FPÖ 2009	<i>Echte Volksvertreter stat EU-Verräter</i>
LAOS 2007	<i>Plaisio theseon</i>
LN 2008	<i>Le idee della Lega</i>
LN 2009	<i>Proposte e obiettivi</i>
NPD 2009	<i>Deutschlands starke Rechte</i>
PVV 2010	<i>De agenda van hoop en optimisme</i>
REP 2002	<i>Sozial-patriotisch-ökologisch</i>
SD 2011	<i>Sverigedemokratiskt principprogram 2011</i>
SVP 2011	<i>Unser parteiprogramm 2011–2015</i>
TF 2011	<i>Suomalaiselle sopivin</i>
VB 2009	<i>Dit is ons land</i>
VB 2012	<i>Het programma van het Vlaams Belang</i>